

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE WILLIAM J. PERRY
 INTERVIEW WITH REPORTERS AND EDITORS OF THE WASHINGTON POST
 WASHINGTON, D.C.
 MARCH 31, 1994

WASHINGTON POST (Final Ed.)

Mar. 31, 1994

Pg. 1

Perry Sharply Warns North Korea

By R. Jeffrey Smith
 Washington Post Staff Writer

Secretary of Defense William J. Perry issued a sharp warning yesterday that the United States intends to stop North Korea from developing a substantial arsenal of nuclear weapons even at the potential cost of another war on the Korean peninsula.

While cautioning that he did not believe war is imminent and was reluctant to sound "an alarmist note," Perry said he has ordered a series of military preparations for possible conflict and will be "doing what I can over the course of the next few months" to focus more attention on the risks of war there.

Perry said the United States has no intention of taking preemotive military action against North Korea, but said he feared North Korea may react to any U.N. sanctions in ways that would require dispatch of additional U.S. troops to South Korea. "We have to be prepared for whatever reaction we get on their part," he said.

Perry's remarks, in an interview with reporters and editors of The Washington Post, underscored the risks of military conflict in Korea and the dilemma facing the Clinton administration in a way that

other U.S. officials have been reluctant to state publicly.

Since he became defense secretary two months ago, Perry has been arguing with-in the administration for a tougher public posture on North Korea, as some conservative lawmakers and former Bush administration officials have also urged. His view is not shared by some officials at the State Department and in the Seoul government, who have argued that war can best be avoided by eschewing harsh rhetoric and emphasizing potential diplomatic solutions.

In blunt terms, Perry said "we're look-

ing at two very grim alternatives" in North Korea. He said one possibility is that the North Koreans could amass within several years a substantial arsenal of nuclear warheads that could be fit atop ballistic missiles capable of reaching neighboring countries.

The other alternative, Perry said, is "facing up to them in a way that could cause a catastrophic war." Since this alternative is so dangerous, he added, Washington's strategy is to proceed "step by step" toward sanctions that may wind up backing North Korea into a corner from which it feels it has to lash back.

But Perry made clear that this danger would not deter Washington from taking whatever actions are needed to prevent North Korea from proceeding with its nuclear program. "We are going to stop them from doing that," he declared.

Perry divided U.S. military preparations into two categories: nonprovocative, low-profile steps being taken now, and more serious measures that would be taken if the United Nations imposes economic sanctions against North Korea—an action Perry estimated is at least several months away.

Aircraft spare parts and maintenance crews are being dispatched now to military bases in South Korea, Japan and elsewhere in the region, he said. The Defense Department is also taking unspecified steps to prepare for the "rapid insertion" of weaponry capable of countering North Korean artillery and is preparing for potential deployment of a second battalion of Patriot missile interceptors to South Korea.

The first U.S. Patriot battalion, announced last week, prepared to leave California's Oakland Army Base yesterday en route to South Korea, where it will be used to help defend U.S. military air bases near Seoul. The second would be shipped in the event U.S. forces are "facing a confrontation," Perry said.

Perry said he recognized "the policies and strategies we invoke today will have a certain risk" of provoking North Korea. But he added, "I'd rather face that risk than face the risk of even greater catastrophe two or three years from now" when the North Koreans have built their nuclear arsenal into a potent regional threat.

He said Washington was "sending them a very strong message, and it will be getting stronger as the months go along." He described the political and military implications of the dispute in broad terms, making clear he be-

lieves they extend beyond Washington's long-standing treaty commitment to defend South Korea.

"It's a question of . . . trying to continue to maintain the relative stability in the western Pacific which we've had ever since the Cold War ended," Perry said. "North Korea poses a very substantial threat to that" because its pursuit of nuclear weapons could engender a regional arms race.

Perry's comments came at a moment of considerable political tension over North Korea's yearlong refusal to accept international inspections of its nuclear facilities. The CIA has already concluded that North Korea may have enough plutonium for at least one nuclear weapon but that additional steps would be needed to build more.

The United States and its allies on the United Nations Security Council began trying yesterday to push through a resolution that would call for North Korea to allow the inspections and also order a report on North Korea's compliance within roughly five weeks from now, officials said. The resolution also would commit the council to take "further action" if North Korea does not cooperate.

The resolution does not specify the action, but President Clinton, vacationing in California, told reporters yesterday that "North Koreans will have to decide whether they wish to be completely isolated or not."

Nevertheless, prospects for an immediate U.N. vote dimmed late yesterday after China and a group of developing countries raised objections. China has not indicated whether it would veto a resolution, and South Korean Foreign Minister Han Seung-Joo told reporters after meeting in Washington yesterday with Secretary of State Warren Christopher that such a veto appeared "highly unlikely."

As outlined by Perry, the Clinton administration is now pursuing a three-part strategy aimed at blocking the North Korean nuclear program. The first aim is to prevent North Korea from driving a diplomatic wedge between the United States and South Korea. Perry said future military preparations would be taken on a timetable acceptable to the South Korean government.

The second U.S. aim is to ensure that U.S. and South Korean ground troops are capable of blunting any North Korean invasion across the demilitarized zone separating

the two countries.

There are no "indicators" that an invasion by North Korean forces is imminent, Perry said, but in any such conflict the United States "would be in it in a minute" because the first North Korean shot would probably strike one of the 37,000 U.S. troops in South Korea.

The third U.S. aim is to ensure that the Air Force "can quickly get overwhelming air power" to the country within a day after any North Korean invasion, for use in "massive airstrikes on North Korean ground forces," Perry said.

Airstrikes are important because a deployment of sufficient U.S. ground forces to repel an invasion and move into North Korea would take two months.

Perry said he plans to "review all contingency plans" for conflict with North Korea in two weeks when he visits South Korea, where he will discuss not just the "nuts and bolts [of military preparations] but also the when and how and why" of taking such steps.

Special correspondent Julia Preston at the United Nations contributed to this report.